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What's Ted Kennedy Thinking About?

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EVER SINCE a brief talk we had just after the assassination of Robert Kennedy, I have been convinced that Ted Kennedy would not soon seek the presidency. But conditions change, particularly given the nature of the current Democratic race.

So to bring myself abreast of the present outlook, I went to see Senator Kennedy the other day, at his home in the Washington hideout. I came away more than ever convinced that he was determined not to run for either President or Vice President, and that he [illegible] him he would [illegible] George McGovern.

I mentioned his conversation back in 1968, and my strong impression that he did not want to run for the presidency. I asked him whether that impression was still correct.

He said: "That's right." He ran over the reasons. He spoke of his family responsibilities. He alluded indirectly to the dangers of another assassination attempt. He said: "There ought to be at least eight years between me and the era of my brothers."

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I ASKED him about running as Vice President with either McGovern or Hubert Humphrey. He began rambling about the Senate. He said there were important opportunities for service there, and that he would grow as he gained seniority and moved up the ladder in the important committees. I took that to mean that he wanted no part of actually being Vice President — of serving in the second spot.

I asked him about reports, emanating from those in touch with the Humphrey camp, of a possible arrangement whereby Kennedy would be guaranteed the nomination in 1976 if he took the No. 2 position this year. He said that was unthinkable. [illegible] American people would never accept such a deal and would rightly reject [illegible] party to it.

I asked him what role he expected to play in the Democratic nomination. He said:

"I had my course sometime ago. My position is not to endorse anybody until after the convention. The only thing that would change that is if it looked as though [illegible] were going to get the nomination. Then I'd do something. But even then I'm not thinking in terms of myself as a candidate."

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I MENTIONED the Humphrey campaign. Kennedy thought Humphrey would have trouble beating McGovern in California and New York. He expressed doubt that Humphrey has, as many believe, the support of the men who lead the party organization.

I mentioned the McGovern campaign. Kennedy was plainly in close touch with the McGovern people. He thought they would go into the convention at Miami Beach with about 1260 votes of the 1509 necessary for nomination. He thought that would be enough to push through.